

**California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley
Merced County Public Forum
Merced, CA – May 18, 2006**

Member Testimony

Federal Representatives

Dee Dee A'Damo – Congressman Dennis Cardoza's Office (18th Congressional District)

- The problems of the San Joaquin Valley (Valley) are some of the worst in the nation:
 - Highest poverty rate in California.
 - Healthcare does not match the growth and immigration.
 - The Valley does not receive adequate federal funds.
- The answers to the problems are:
 - Governor's Executive Order.
 - Support for Medical Center at UC Merced.
 - A Valley water plan.
 - A plan for Highway 99.
 - A blueprint for the infrastructure and growth in the Valley.

Cheryl Lang - Congressman Jim Costa's Office (20th Congressional District)

- Voiced support on behalf of Congressman Costa.

Government Panel

Mike Nelson – Chairman, Merced County Board of Supervisors

- Improve the quality of life in the Valley by using state and federal dollars to:
 - Improve Highway 99.
 - Improve education at UC Merced and community colleges.
 - Improve the healthcare system.
 - Establish housing projects.
- California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) must be reevaluated because it adversely affects the ability to develop the Valley.
- Future prosperity will require broadband, education and housing.
- The leadership structure that would work best is a combination between state and local governments.

Lee Anderson – Superintendent of Schools, Merced County

- Focus on K-12 education development and reform.
- Must include the State Superintendent to have proper reform.
- The Partnership should consider pre-school programs for the Valley.
- The Central Valley Education Coalition is a good example of how coalition building can improve education.

John Garamendi, Jr. – Vice Chancellor for University Relations, UC Merced

- Support a Medical Center at UC Merced.
- There needs to be a blue print for growth in the Valley.
- Partnership should focus on the air pollution problem in the Valley.
- The best leadership plan for the Partnership is the current structure.

Frank Quintero – Economic Development Officer, Merced County

- The Partnership plan should not be too big or out of reach – keep it simple to start.
- Focus on fixing Highway 99 and the interchanges.
- Support a Medical Center at UC Merced.
- Develop a system to process waste water.
- Invest in the business community in Merced.

Mark Pazin – Sheriff Merced County

- Need to keep the focus on public safety.

Steve Rath – City Manager Los Banos

- The growth of bay area commuters is straining the infrastructure in Los Banos.
- There needs to be a plan for infrastructure.
- Education programs should focus on K-12 education.
- The leadership structure should include all of the counties and state agencies.

Robert Smith – Special Projects Director, Merced Department of Public Works

- One major hurdle in planning for growth in the Valley is preserving agriculture:
 - The Partnership should consider high density cities.
 - Reevaluate CEQA and other environmental standards that pose a problem to growth.

Jess Brown – Merced County Association of Governments

- Waste water standards are out of date and they should be reevaluated.
- The Partnerships plan for the Valley must have state and local components:
 - Local needs should be addressed.
 - The Valley must fit into an overall State plan.
 - Find a consistent voice among the counties in the Valley.

Business Panel

Mark Hendrickson – President, Greater Merced Chamber of Commerce

- Three areas that will help improve the Valley:
 - Develop industry outside agriculture.
 - Balance clean air acts with business.
 - Assist with work force development.

Scott Galbraith – Merced County Economic Development Corporation

- Assist small businesses in the Valley by creating a business incubator.
- Improve the healthcare problems for the San Joaquin Valley.
- Support a Medical Center at UC Merced.

Louie Bandoni – President, Merced County Farm Bureau

- Agriculture is a big business and the main source of income for the Valley – don't let growth take over agriculture.
- Reevaluate SB 50.
- Top priorities for the Merced County Farm Bureau:
 - Planned growth.
 - Water storage.
 - Preserving agriculture.

Kevin Stone – Home Builders Association

- Economic development should supersede no growth.
- Support SB 1800 – a housing bill authored by Senators Ducheny and Cedillo.

Community Panel

Bob McLaughlin – Mercy Medical Center, Merced

- The Valley has a shortage of nurses and specialists.
- Support a Medical Center at UC Merced.

Paul Lao – Attorney and Community Leader

- Community would be better served if community centers are created to house senior citizens and youth activities.

Diana Almanza – A Woman's Place of Merced County (with Ana Pagan Director of Merced County Human Services Agency)

- The biggest problems that affect the community are poverty, teen pregnancy and methamphetamines.
- The state needs to provide more funding for drug programs.
- The state should reimburse tuition for impoverished students.